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I returned to the city only last night—after an absence of two months—and passing the Academy building this morning, was surprised to find an exhibition in progress.

As usual, on a first visit, I had no catalogue, as I think it best always to get my first impressions from the paintings, without regard to the names of the artists; indeed, I have very little veneration for names, whatever may be their antiquity or eminence.

In a future article I will be happy to enter into particular criticisms. The enclosure is merely to give you an idea of my critical ability.

Hoping to hear from you soon, I remain:

Yours truly,

* * *

THE ACADEMY EXHIBITION.

It really seems as if there were no hope for that fossilized institution—the National Academy of Design—except in final dissolution. Year after year we have noted the steady deterioration of the exhibitions, from a first promise of future excellence to mediocrity, and from mediocrity to these present inane drivings of the brush that point to a speedy return (if indeed it has not been already reached) to the status of the “connecting link,” which it was hoped had been passed centuries ago in the natural process of evolution.

This present exhibition of the Academy, in aid of the Bartholdi pedestal, is infinitely worse and more dreary than any of its predecessors, for in them one could stroll around with an interesting companion and not pay the least heed to the paintings on the walls, but now these monstrosities force their ugliness upon us *malgré nous*. We, however, console ourselves with the hope that they are the last expiring contortions of the venerable Academicians whose names they bear, and that we may soon be able to say thankfully, “*Requiescat in pace.*”

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In answer to our correspondent, we can only say that the ART UNION has not yet supplied itself with that necessary evil, an art critic, and we have come to the conclusion that we cannot engage him to serve on our staff until he has proven his popularity with the public. To give him an opportunity to let his light shine, we publish his communication.

Our correspondent has, however, made a slight mistake, in confounding the Bartholdi Pedestal Loan Exhibition, containing only foreign pictures, with one of the Academy's exhibitions of American pictures. Except for this, the criticism does not appear to be very different from the usual order of Academy notices.—ED.

THE TARIFF AGITATION.

From recent newspaper reports, I am informed that a bill has been drawn and introduced in the House of Representatives, to abrogate all duties on works of art—said works “to include all paintings, drawings, photographs and statues in marble or other stone.” This bill is said to have “the approval of the Society of American Artists, as stated by Mr. William M. Chase, in behalf of a committee of that organization.”

A year ago, a number of the younger artists of this city, who are in the habit of exhibiting pictures abroad, and who, it was whispered, were not averse to embracing an opportunity to curry favor with foreign artists and American dealers, presented a memorial to the Tariff Commission, asking an abolition of all duties on imported pictures. Persons, however, who felt that they understood the matter rather better than these interested young men, explained to the Commission that the duty should not be removed, if the Government felt any interest at all in American art; whereupon, in a burst of enthusiasm for the art of America, the Government, instead of removing the duty, increased it from ten to thirty per cent.

But neither a ten per cent nor a thirty per cent duty is what the thinking artist would desire. He would ask a *specific* instead of an *advalorem* duty. What is really needed is a measure that will strike at the importation of mediocre, low-priced work, but which will not prejudicially affect the importation of really good foreign pictures. No *advalorem* duty that could be established could keep foreign trash out of the country,—even though fifty or a hundred per cent were levied; while even a slight *advalorem* duty—like the former one of ten per cent—is prejudicial to the importation of good foreign work. The American artist makes no fight against the importation of representative pictures by representative foreign artists; on the contrary, he welcomes them, because they will help the growth of art appreciation in this country.

Now, suppose a *specific* duty of fifty dollars were levied upon every picture by a foreign artist, brought into this country, irrespective of the painter's reputation, the subject, size or value of the work. This duty would be sufficiently large to cut off the excessive profits made from the handling of the very cheap foreign pictures, and would practically bar them out, yet it would only amount to the old ten per cent on a five hundred dollar picture, and five per cent on a thousand dollar work—the percentage decreasing as the value of the painting increased. This would effectually encourage the importation of the best pictures.

This whole question is one of as much importance to the country itself as it is to the artists; and of the latter, it especially affects the younger men; it does not matter so much to the older and better established artists.

After a man has achieved a reputation like that of a Corot, Bouguereau, Gerome, Millet or Meissonier, or like that of George Inness or Eastman Johnson or others of our own countrymen who could be named, his art becomes, so to speak, universal. His fame belongs to the world as well as to his country, and "protection" or "non-protection" is a matter of almost indifference to him. But with the young artist, striving to maintain existence throughout his term of art study, or during his struggle to obtain recognition and reputation, the question is a very serious one. He must depend, to a great extent, upon selling pictures at moderate prices in order to obtain a livelihood, and if low-priced foreign pictures of equal merit with his own are admitted free of duty, his own hope of selling pictures must fall utterly. For, in the first place, the foreign pictures can be produced at a much lower price than his own, because the cost of living abroad—as most young art students and painters live—is very much lower than is the cost of living to the young American artist, all art materials are cheaper, and models can be hired at much lower prices there than here. In the second place, there is already a strong disposition among many Americans to buy something produced abroad rather than something else produced at home, even if the articles are equal in merit and the same in price.

In the event of free foreign art, then none but wealthy young Americans could afford to study art, and thus would practically be shut out the large class of earnest workers from which have sprung the great artists of all times. It seems as if a certain amount of struggling were necessary in the career of a young man, in order that he may be led to develop his capabilities to the highest degree; but it will not do to handicap the student in such a way that his struggle can only result in defeat.

If the Government expects American art to advance, and American artists to spring up who will do their country credit, it is poor policy to discourage at the outset those to whom the country must look for the American art of the future. And it is also poor policy to encourage the importation of cheap, mediocre work, because the influence of such work militates against the true artistic cultivation of the people. Besides, there would be an inconsistency, too, in admitting foreign paintings into the country free of duty, when the foreign art materials used in the production of pictures are taxed upon their entry. Thus an American artist must either pay the duty levied upon foreign materials, or pay the prices American manufactures, who enjoy protection, are enabled to charge. Under the circumstances, does it not seem that the American artist has a right to ask some protection?

A FRIEND OF AMERICAN ART.

ALBERT F. BELLAWS

FRIENDS of American art were pained to learn, a few weeks ago, of the death of ALBERT F. BELLAWS, an artist who stood high in his profession, and whose noble character as a man endeared him to all who were so fortunate as to know him personally.

The death of Mr. Bellows was not unexpected; for many months he had suffered from a malady which he knew must prove fatal, and several months ago he gave up his studio in this city to a brother-artist, expressing the belief, at the time, that he should never be able to paint again. The last weeks of his life were spent at his summer home, in Auburndale, Massachusetts, with his son, who is a physician. He passed away peacefully on the twenty-third day of November.

The life of Mr. Bellows was a rich, beautiful harmony. Into it there entered nothing sensational, nothing spasmodic. It was simple, quiet, beautiful. He won his way gradually to the front rank of the American artists, and maintained his position there by the conscientious work which was characteristic of him. His paintings were not obtrusive, never aggressive, but reflected the quiet, tender, sympathetic nature of the man, and were lovable as he was lovable.

Albert F. Bellows was born in Milford, Massachusetts, in 1829. His father, Dr. Albert J. Bellows, was a physician, and the author of a several important medical works. From him, his ancestry is traced back to the Bellows family which came to this country in the ship "Hopewell," in 1635.

Early in life Mr. Bellows displayed a taste for art. When sixteen years of age, he entered the office of Mr. A. B. Young, of Boston, and began the study of architecture. When he had reached the age of twenty years, he entered into a partnership with Mr. I. D. Toule, of Boston, an architect of established reputation. The new firm prospered, but at the end of its first year, Mr. Bellows, urged by a growing art enthusiasm, withdrew from the partnership in order to give his whole attention to art study and the practice of art. No sooner had he decided to devote himself to art than he was tendered the position of Principal of the New England School of Design, which he accepted and held until his twenty-seventh year, when he resigned his principalship in order to go to Europe, to further educate himself in his chosen profession. While in Europe, he studied in Paris and Antwerp, principally in the Royal Academy of the latter city, his attention being directed at first almost exclusively to genre subjects.

"And there the art student from the new world," says Mr. Benjamin, in his appreciative sketch of Mr. Bellows, "the only American then studying in the Netherlands, pursued his studies with such success that, in 1858, he was elected an honorary member of the Royal Society of Painters of Belgium."